

JUNE 25, 2003

SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION POLICY COULD BE ANOTHER BRICK OFF THE WALL SEPARATING CHURCH AND STATE

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today said that the latest proposal from the Bush Administration is an attempt to knock off another brick from the wall separating church and state.

In a letter to President Bush criticizing his position paper on the hiring practices of faith-based organizations, Schakowsky wrote, *"Your position that religious organizations should be allowed to discriminate in hiring based on religion and sexual orientation while using federal dollars to provide social services is a clear violation of our country's commitment to the separation of church and state and protection of civil rights."*

Below is the full text of the Schakowsky's letter to President Bush:

June 25, 2003

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

I was deeply disturbed to read your position paper regarding the hiring practices of faith-based organizations. Your position that religious organizations should be allowed to discriminate in hiring based on religion and sexual orientation while using federal dollars to provide social services is a clear violation of our country's commitment to the separation of church and state and protection of civil rights.

It is true that faith-based organizations are often effective vehicles for the delivery of services to those who are poor, homeless, jobless, suffering from addiction, or escaping violence. For years, a broad array of religious organizations have been very successful at implementing programs with taxpayer dollars while respecting civil rights and maintaining a clear separation between providing services and religious activities. I believe it is unnecessary, as well as harmful to our citizens, to implement any policies that allow for employment discrimination, and I strongly urge you to reexamine your position.

If we truly respect the Constitution and, as you said, "recognize that government has no business endorsing a religious creed," we must ensure that federal taxpayer dollars are not used to support any type of explicitly religious work. We must be vigilant in protecting all Americans' rights and prohibiting any type of employment discrimination when federal funds are being spent. Anything less would be to cross a line that Americans from all political and religious spectrums have long supported - the line that separates our democratic government from our freedom to practice and believe in the religion and lifestyle of our choice.

I appreciate your willingness to hear my views.

Sincerely,

Jan Schakowsky

Member of Congress

cc: Jim Towey

Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives